S
363.25
JSM
1982
Jan

PLEASE

Montana State Library
3 0864 1006 2255 7

STATE OF MONTANA
DIVISION OF FORENSIC SCIENCE
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
275 West Front Street, Missoula, Mt. 59801 (406) 728-4970

Ronald L. Rivers, M.D.
State Medical Examiner

Jay M. Glass
Director of Forensic Services

Arnold B. Melnikoff
Laboratory Bureau Chief

STATE DOCUMENTS COLLECTION

JUN 9 - 1983

MONTANA STATE LIBRARY
1515 E. 6th AVE.
HELENA, MONTANA 59620

RECEIVED W/ PERIODICALS

JANUARY 1982

DEATH INVESTIGATION - MONTANA LAW ENFORCEMENT ACADEMY

Eleven sheriffs departments and six police departments were represented at the week long course on death investigation. Presentations were made by Drs. Pfaff, Mueller, Rivers, McNie (California Institute of Forensic Science) Johnson (Forensic Odontologist) and Smith (Forensic Anthropologist). This high calibre group prepared the attendees in the many aspects of good death investigation. Their agencies will benefit considerably from their expertise. We hope that every county will eventually have an individual trained at this course.

Dr. Ronald Rivers and the staff of the Forensic Science Division extend our very best wishes to all of you for a very prosperous and successful 1982.

JANUARY 1982

ON CALL SCHEDULE - MONTANA STATE MEDICAL EXAMINER

275 W. Front Street
Missoula, Montana 59802

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2 RON RIVERS
3 RON RIVERS	4	5	6	7	8	9 JOHN PHAFF
10 JOHN PFAFF	11	12	13	14	15	16 RON RIVERS
17 RON RIVERS	18	19	20	21	22	23 KEN MUELLER
24 KEN MUELLER 31 RON RIVERS	25	26	27	28	29	30 RON RIVERS

Telephone Numbers: State Office - 728-4970
WATS Line - 243-5796

Home Phone: Dr. Ron Rivers- 728-2033 (Home)
(week nights call unless otherwise indicated)

Dr. John Pfaff - Great Falls
Hospital - 727-3333
Home - 727-3905

Dr. Ken Mueller- Billings
Hospital - 657-7000
Home - 248-3024

January 1982
GUNSHOT WOUND TO THE HEAD
R. L. Rivers, M.D.

"Why would he shoot himself over the holidays?", the gray haired wife cried. "It is such a merry time of year." The daughter pointed to a nearby gun cleaning kit. "Maybe it was an accident, he was always cleaning his guns and considered himself an expert in gun handling."

The investigator focused the camera for a close-up of the soot-surrounded gunshot wound of the right temple. 'Ma'am, I'd like the doctor to take a look at this. He can give us a better idea of what may have happened."

Meanwhile the deputy casually thumbed through the old bible setting on a bedside stand. He also picked through some crumpled papers in the wastebasket. "Are these the medications he was taking?", asked the deputy. "Yes", the wife answered. "He just got them filled this week." The deputy placed the bottles into an evidence bag.

Later, back at the office, the deputies agree that a psychological autopsy may be in order.

QUESTIONS:

1) Should an autopsy be ordered in this situation? Why?

2) What was the deputy looking for in the bible or waste-basket?

3) Why did the deputy confiscate the medicine bottles?

4) What is a psychological autopsy?

ANSWERS:

1. Whenever the family disagrees with what appears to be the apparent manner of death the investigator would be wise to order an autopsy. The findings of a physician are often more readily accepted than the opinion of law enforcement officials on a case such as this. The doctor is used then to support the official in his verdict if questioned later. Suspicions and doubts by the community are thus eliminated. Insurance investigators and attorneys are often satisfied by the results of an autopsy. Then the official is saved from the costs and time of dealing with their investigation.

2. Approximately one third of suicide victims will leave a note. It is estimated that as many as one half leave a note but it is hidden or destroyed by the finder. The note may be nasty or actually a will injurious to the finder. There may only be time to throw it in the wastebasket or the victim may put it in the family bible to be discovered later. In this day and age of electronics, remember to consider a tape recorded message or even a videotape if a T.V. camera is nearby.

3. Many suicide victims, especially the elderly, will use two or three methods to kill themselves. The intent is to make sure death occurs even if one method doesn't work. It is not unusual to find alcohol and drug levels in a victim who has died by other means. The laboratory, tipped off by a large number of pills missing from one of the bottles, can find a lethal dose in the gastric contents. This finding will support the officials in ruling a death as suicide. If the gunshot wound is questioned as being accidental then how can fifty pills in the stomach be explained?

4. Family members often refused to admit that the decendent was depressed or threatening suicide. They either object to the thought of suicide or may have ulterior insurance motives. The psychological autopsy is simply the determination of the decedent's mental state before death. This can be discovered by carefully questioning the decedent's friends, employers, co-workers, teachers or fellow students. Their statements can also be used to support the coroner's verdict.